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The Concept of Resurrection with Special Emphasis on the Views of Rudolf Bultmann

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The Concept of the Resurrection
/ with special emphasis
on the views of
Rudolf Bultmann

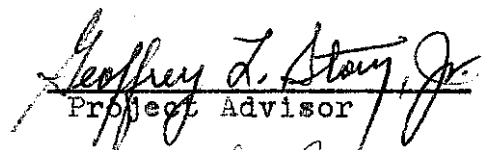
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The concept of the Resurrection of our Lord has been a point of confusion for many, both formal students of theology and thinking lay people. It has also been the topic of much debate and many books. Some have chosen to disregard it almost completely, thus changing the content and direction of the Gospel's message. Some have limited it to such a degree that it means only the moment of Christ's rising from the grave. Others have taken into account the implications of a world existing under a resurrected Lord. Some have called it a historical fact, others say it is obviously non-historical or transhistorical. What the Resurrection was and/or is, how it came about, how it was viewed by New Testament man and what significance it has for man today are the questions being asked. One question basic to all these deals with how the New Testament Scriptures are to be read. Certainly a paper of this scope could never be an exhaustive study on form criticism nor a new search for the historical Jesus. Neither could it hope to give any definite, dogmatic answers to these questions which have been the focal points of theologians over a long span of years. The field is so broad and so involved that one

can only touch on certain points hoping to provide some insight and give some clarification to a few of the issues that have been so hotly contested, especially in recent times.

First of all this paper will deal briefly with two men who are representative of a certain way of thinking about the Resurrection that has been prevalent for many years. The bulk of the paper, however will be concerned with the work of Professor Rudolf Bultmann and some of his critics. Since the author is not by any means familiar with all his work nor with that of his critics the positions and arguments presented will be limited in scope. But it is hoped, nevertheless, that some measure of understanding will result from this investigation. To aid in this discussion there is a need for some background material notably the various meanings of the term resurrection itself, and then a short discussion of the disposition of first century Palestine toward the concept of resurrection.

In the Greek the term used for resurrection is *ἀνάστασις*. In ancient literature the term has meant rise, as in Josephus's usage, the 'erection' of a statue; resurrection from the dead, used from the time of Aeschylus onward; in the past referring specifically to Jesus' Resurrection; or in reference to the future resurrection--the Judgment

Day.¹ ἀνάστασις is used in the New Testament not only to mean resurrection from the dead per se, but as in Luke 2:34--
εἰς πτῶσιν καὶ ἀνάστασιν πολλῶν ἐν τῇ Ἰσραήλ²---"for the fall
and rising of many in Israel."³ However, in most cases
ἀνάστασις may be translated resurrection from the dead. "The
idea of a resurrection from the dead is by no means limited
in religious writings to the New Testament and New Testa-
ment Apocrypha. The most direct influence for the Christ-
ian writers came, of course, from the writings of Judaism.
The Hebrew transliteration of the idea of the revival of
the dead is tehiyyat hametim and many references to a res-
urrection, albeit a general one, are found in Hebrew lit-
erature. For example in Daniel 12:2 one reads: "Many of
those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake; some
shall live forever, others shall be an everlasting horror
and disgrace." And again in 2 Maccabees 7:9 during the
torturing of the seven brothers:

You accursed wretch, you dismiss us from
this present life, but the King of the u-
niverse will raise us up to an everlast-
ing renewal of life because we have died
for his laws.⁴

1. Arndt, William, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, Illinois, 1957, pages 59-60.
2. Nestle, Erwin, Novum Testamentum Graece, Wuttembergische Bibelanstalt Stuttgart, in Germany, 1927.
3. All English New Testament passages are from The Holy Bible, Revised Standard Version, Thomas Nelson and Sons, New York, New York, 1953
4. Metzger, Bruce, ed., The Oxford Annotated Apocrypha of the Old Testament, RSV, Oxford University Press, New York, New York, 1965.

Even 2 Baruch, which was "in part an implicit polemic against Christianity"¹ written in the latter half of the first century, and hence probably not much in sympathy with the doctrines of Christianity, holds to the idea of the resurrection:

Then all who have fallen asleep in hope of Him shall rise again. And it shall come to pass at that time that the treasures will be opened in which is preserved the number of the souls of the righteous, and they shall come forth, and a multitude of souls shall be seen together in one assemblage of one thought, and the first shall rejoice and the lost shall not be grieved. For they know that the time has come of which it is said, that it is the consummation of the times. But the souls of the wicked, when they behold all these things, shall then waste away the more. For they shall know that their torment has come and the perdition has arrived. (2 Baruch 30:2-5)²

These and other writings show that the idea of a resurrection was not at all unknown in Judaism and through the time of Christ. The New Testament man would not have been likely to reject the idea of the resurrection on the grounds of improbability, but neither would he be so steeped in ideas of resurrection that he would automatically assume a resurrection from the facts and ideas of Jesus's case. No one expected a single resurrection from the dead before the day of the general resurrection. Even Martha who was grieving over the death of her brother Lazarus did not expect it:

Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life...." (John 11:23-25)

1. Charles, R. H., Ed., The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament, Volume II, Pseudepigrapha, Clarendon Press, Oxford, England, 1963, page 470

2. Ibid., page 470

In early Judaism the idea of a resurrection of the dead had only been hinted at in Hebrew literature. But just before the time of the Book of Daniel and forward resurrection and the events of the last days became more clearly delineated. A belief in the idea of a physical resurrection was one of the points which divided the pharisees from the Sadducees. "For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor angel, nor spirit; but the Pharisees acknowledge them all." (Acts 23:8). The idea of a bodily resurrection would have been anathema to the Greeks who believed in psychophysical dualism and thus despised the body, but to the Jews it was acceptable. In fact several Jewish writers did not even foresee a change in the physical body at all. They interpreted the renewal of life as an event happening within the same structure which characterized the first life. For instance, "Thy dead shall live, their bodies shall rise, O dwellers of the dust, awake and sing for joy!" (Isaiah 26:19). Or again Ezekiel 37:12b--"And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people." (However, some scholars think that this passage is an allegory). This concept of the physical resurrection in the same flesh and bones fits quite well with the Jewish view of psychophysical unity. The spirit and the flesh were not conceived of as two separate entities, but rather when God breathed His breath into the clay it became a living being--an inseparable unity.

This concept revealed again in 2 Baruch is quite different than the concept in Saint Paul. In 2 Baruch 49-50:3 one reads in part:

In what shape will those live who live in Thy day?

...
Will they then resume this form of the present,
And put on these entrammelling members,

...
Or wilt Thou perchance change these things which have been in the world
As also the world? ?"
And he answered and said to me...
"For the earth shall then assuredly restore the dead,

...
It shall make no change in their form,
But as it has received, so shall it restore them.
For then it will be necessary to show to the living that the dead have come to life again..."

In Saint Paul (I Corinthians 15:35-50) his basic ideas may well be based on these elements in Judaism, but with one important difference. Saint Paul recognizes a spiritual body, about which he does not elaborate, but which is not the same as the present physical body. It is the spiritual body which will be resurrected. "So it is with the resurrection of the dead....It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body." (I Corinthians 42a and 44a).

Another feature which distinguishes the Hebrew writings from the New Testament Scriptures is that bodily resurrection is "nowhere specifically attributed"¹ to the Messiah. The Messiah's reign is indeed seen as unending, but there is no mention of a resurrection of the savior. Here it can be

1. Tenney, Merrill C., The Reality of the Resurrection, Harper & Row, Evanston, Illinois, 1963, page 28

seen that the proclamation of Jesus as the Messiah did not necessarily entail belief in his resurrection. It was not expected of him. Jesus repeatedly asked those around Him if they did not know that the Son of Man must suffer, die and on the third day be raised. But the idea apparently did not fit into their conception of the victor over Roman oppression. There may have been of course, through various interpretations of the suffering servant passages in Isaiah, this element, but it "is foreign to the official expectation at least."¹ And without the suffering what basis is there for the individual resurrection of the Messiah from the dead? In Judaism, then, resurrection was recognized, but it was always held to be the resurrection of the corporate body of Israel at the end of time. The individual resurrection of Christ Jesus as the first fruits is unique.

From this very brief survey of Hebrew thinking in regards to this topic three conclusions can be drawn: first, the idea of resurrection, as has already been said, was not at all unknown in Judaism before Christ. Secondly, the idea of a single individual's resurrection was generally not considered. And lastly, since the idea of resurrection was held as being something that all would take part in in the Last Days, Jesus Christ's Resurrection was not deemed a necessary part of the messianic hope.

1. Cullman, Oscar, The Christology of the New Testament, The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1959, page 58

The idea of the suffering, dying, and resurrected Messiah was, however, a part of Jesus's viewpoint--at the Gospels. Many of these sections which deal with Jesus's discussions of these ideas are held by some scholars to be later additions made by the early church. However, this problem is by no means resolved and for purposes of this discussion these sections will stand. The following are some of the places where Jesus talks about the suffering, dying, and resurrected Messiah. In Matthew 26:32 Jesus began speaking of His resurrection. Later in the same chapter, verse 54, He did not appeal to His Father for help during the arrest because "...how then should the scriptures be fulfilled?" The Pharisees remembered His proclamation of His Resurrection when they said to Pilate, "Sir, we remember how that imposter said, while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise again.'" In Mark 9:31b Christ became more specific about the happenings to come: "The Son of Man will be delivered into the hands of men and they will kill him; and when he is killed, after three days he will rise." But His disciples did not at all understand what He meant. Jesus's view of the messiahship then, according to the Gospels, did not hold to the official Jewish suppositions. In Luke 24:45-46 He interprets Hosea 6:2 to mean "...that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead...." About the only one besides Jesus to know anything about the suffering Messiah was Caiaphas, high priest for the year. In John 11:50b he says that "one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation should not perish." But even he does not speak of this man's resurrection. To Jesus, death and resurrection formed a real part of

His mission. He saw them, as far as can be ascertained from Holy Scripture, as the fulfillment of the Messiah's role-- the turning about of the world.

This centrality concerning the Resurrection of Jesus Christ has remained with Christians throughout the ages and up into the present day. What exactly it is that makes it so important is not so readily agreed upon. Leslie D. Weatherhead in his book The Christian Agnostic spends a great deal of time formulating theories as to how Christ's physical body left the tomb. After ruling out theft and unconsciousness rather than actual death he proceeds to postulate that the particles of His fleshly body may have become gaseous and merely mingled with the air. This feat, he explains could have been accomplished if one assumes that Jesus' mind was at a higher stage of evolution than even present day man's and that he simply placed mind over matter. However, for Weatherhead it is not really important to discern what happened to Jesus' earthly body. What is important is the recognition of the fact that "the essential ego of Christ survived death and proved that survival to his followers."¹ Here he terms the mind over matter technique which is responsible for this ego survival as a "magical quality". Christ then merely used the disciples' sense centers temporarily in order to get His point across. He made Himself to be an illusion for their benefit.

Frank Morison, in his book Who Moved the Stone?, at-

¹ Weatherhead, Leslie D., The Christian Agnostic, Abingdon Press, New York, New York, 1965, page 131

tempts to reconstruct a step by step, minute by minute account of what most probably happened from the time just before Jesus' arrest to the time of the Resurrection. Needless to say he too spends a great deal of time formulating theories as to how the body got out of the grave. Both Morison and Weatherhead are loathe to accept a physical resurrection and spend most of their time turning Christ into an escape artist second only to Houdini, or, as in the case of Morison, showing various ways in which have been in error concerning the discovery of the empty tomb. Morison apologizes for the women by saying that it was still dark out and perhaps they went by mistake to the wrong tomb, or again, being dark, they mistook the gardener for Jesus instead of Jesus for the gardener as the Gospels would have it. Or again they may have misunderstood the gardener (whom they quite naturally at that hour of the morning mistook for an angel) when he said that "He is not here" meaning simply that they were at the wrong tomb, not that He had been resurrected. Jesus had indeed been resurrected according to Morison, but in the end it was not quite a physical resurrection.

For both men the only significance seems to be that Christ proved that those who followed Him would survive death. He had beaten the cosmic rap. Thus it becomes important for them to deal with the method and details of the actual moment of Resurrection. Therefore all their hypotheses become mere speculation, worth barely anything to modern man--or ancient man for that matter. These theories hardly

need to be refuted except to say that the emptiness of the tomb in the final analysis cannot and does not say all that needs to be said about the Resurrection. It merely states that as far as was known the body was gone--no one will ever know whether it could have been produced or not. As to hallucinations or mistakes on the part of the disciples these are hardly plausible. The women grieved because they wanted the body restored--they had no hope or desire of finding Jesus alive. The fallacies fairly point themselves out. As to Weatherhead's statement that the "importance of the Resurrection lay in the fact that it proved survival to His followers", it seems to run against the tone of the New Testament. Christ was not giving pre-views--peep-shows, as it were--of what happened after death.

~~...there is not in Scripture~~ ...there is not in Scripture the faintest suggestion that the Resurrection was new evidence for something that had in fact been always happening. The New Testament writers speak as if Christ's achievement in rising from the dead was the first event of its kind in the whole story of the universe.¹

Many books have been written which deal point by point with various theories as to how the Resurrection happened (if one can use the term 'happened' in a historical sense). ~~But the implications of love--not only those of life after death for~~ certain individuals--are rarely, if ever, handled by these men. Their preoccupation with mechanics overshadows the mean

1. Lewis, Clive Staples, Miracles, The Macmillan Company, New York, New York, 1947, page 173

ing of the Resurrection. They show no interest in the act of saving love or in the implications for the world of a life under the Resurrection. Taking these two authors as examples of this kind of scholarship it can be said that they seem to have missed the point.

Professor Rudolf Bultmann has set forth a different viewpoint than those which have so far been presented. But in order to understand his theory of the Resurrection it will first be necessary to say a few words about his general understanding of Jesus Christ. For Bultmann the only significant reality is existential reality. This does not mean that Bultmann does not consider the historical Jesus to be important. He expresses his belief in the historicity of the earthly Jesus and in Him he apprehends the eschatological event. This, however, is the non-objectifiable event. It cannot be proved by the historian. The meaning of Jesus Christ as the logos is not an abstract thing, but rather something that only has significance as it is encountered at a point in history by a person. Jesus is the eschatological event--in Him time and death have lost their meaning and power. This eschatological event is the proclamation of the Word of God. Bultmann speaks of Jesus Christ as the Son of God, but he does not mean it in a literal sense. He means the expression of God. Christ was the initiator of the Word: that is, what God had to say to man he initiated in Jesus Christ. Faith "in the crucified and risen Lord" "is response to the Word of God."¹ Jesus Christ's

1. Bultmann, Rudolf, Kerygma and Myth, Harper & Row, New York, New York, 1953. page 208

actions--especially the crucifixion-resurrection--seem to constitute for Bultmann the first encounter with the eschatological event, that is the reception by man of the Word of God. However, for him the Christ-event is not by any means the only statement of the Word:

...a man just like myself speaks to me the Word of God: in him the Word of God becomes incarnate. For the incarnation is likewise an eschatological event and not a datable event of the past; it is an event which is continually being re-enacted in the event of the proclamation.¹

Jesus then was unique only in that He was the vessel used to carry the eschatological event. The man who preaches becomes the Word of God incarnate because it is only the Word that is important, not the man, whether that man be Jesus or anyone else. The word of preaching is the eschatological event and Christ is that event only so far as He is the logos, the Word. This Gospel or Word since it is carried by Christ cannot be a proclamation of Christ. As Cullmann says;

According to Bultmann, Jesus only proclaimed God the Father and his kingdom...In the final analysis Bultmann's denial agrees with the well-known thesis of Harnack that only the Father and not the Son belongs to the Gospel of Jesus.²

Jesus Christ is the Word of proclamation, and it is only the word that is valid. Bultmann does not actually stop to give

1. Bultmann, Rudolf, Kerygma and Myth, Harper & Row, New York, New York, 1953, page 209

2. Cullmann, Oscar, The Christology of the New Testament, The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1959, page 8

a rational picture of Jesus Christ's relation to the Father. In that He is the Word of God He is the eschatological event, but in that He was a concrete objectifiable human being He cannot be the basis of the existential faith. The Jesus of history cannot become an existential event for modern man and thus the search for Him need not be pursued. It is only this Word of God that is relevant for man and this Word is inevitable in preaching. Nothing in history such as a bodily resurrection or a single historical man can be used to transform man where he is today.

From here it can be seen what form his theory of the Resurrection will take. For him belief in the Resurrection of Christ's physical body is completely unnecessary to Christian faith. In fact he cannot see how a man who accepts twentieth century reality can accept it and still keep his integrity intact. In the first place it can never be proved, as evidenced by the pure conjectures in which Weatherhead and Morison deal. Secondly, even if it could be proved that fact in itself could not give meaning and understanding to the event of the Crucifixion. It would be merely one more fact to add to a list of facts. For Bultmann then the Resurrection is obviously "not an event of history with a self-evident meaning."¹ Far from being an event in history the Resurrection is viewed, in its demythologized form, as

1. Bultmann, Rudolf, Kerygma and Myth, Harper & Row, New York, New York, 1953, page 38

the realization that the Cross of Christ was not a defeat, but a victory. And this realization comes not from any event in itself, but from preaching the ever present Word. Therefore what happened to the disciples was that it quite suddenly came upon them that what they had first taken to be the end, the defeat, was in reality a victory since they believed that Jesus was the Son of God, the Messiah, and that "when he suffered death, (he) was already the Son of God, and his death by itself was the victory over the power of death."¹ The event of Easter Day lay not in any physical reappearance of Jesus but in the realization of the disciples that they had witnessed the eschatological event in that the Lord of Life had given Himself over to death and had thereby conquered it. The whole Easter story, therefore, began as a mythological account of a wholly spiritual 'act'. It may be said then that from Bultmann's point of view the Crucifixion of Jesus contained the Resurrection within it. There was no second historical event, since the death of the Christ could only mean the end of time for death itself and hence an awakening of the reality of the world. Christ came to turn man's self-assertiveness to a realization and a completion of his true potentials. This was accomplished through the faith of man in the victory. The victory comes through the Cross. Thus "faith in the Resurrection is really the same thing as

1. Bultmann, Rudolf, Kerygma and Myth, Harper & Row, New York, New York, 1953, page 39

faith in the saving efficacy of the cross" and faith in the saving efficacy of the cross comes through faith "in the word of preaching."¹ The preaching stems from that rise of belief in the disciples. Again and again Bultmann makes it plain that in these words of preaching, that is in the kerygma, not in any historical event of a resurrection, does man receive illumination and reconciliation. It is the word of preaching that is always existential. It is the eschatological event in this form that constantly makes the Crucifixion and Resurrection realities here and now (II Corinthians 4:10-11). The Resurrection takes place within each man as he hears the word of preaching, that is as he experiences the rise of faith. Therefore, for Bultmann, God is seen as bringing forth the eschatological event in an historical man--Jesus of Nazareth; however, it is not the person that is important but rather the transhistorical event which He proclaims.

The transcendence of God is not as in myth reduced to immanence. Instead, we have the paradox of a transcendent God present and active in history: 'The Word became flesh!'²

Preaching is done "not to deliver a speech about objective facts, but to extend a call to faith as it was granted to the disciples."³

1. Bultmann, Rudolf, Kerygma and Myth, Harper & Row, New York, New York, 1953, page 41

2. Ibid.

3. Goppelt, Leonhard, The Easter Message Today, Thomas Nelson and Sons, New York, New York, 1964, page 17 quote is from Marcus Barth's introduction.

The Resurrection then in the word of preaching is important because of the individual viewpoint it may give to a person. Any historical background would be virtually superfluous. All that is important is the re-evaluation of the individual in the light of the acceptance of the Easter faith. Man cannot accomplish this re-evaluation by himself. It has been done for him in the event of the Christ-faith. It is only for man to believe, to have faith in the Easter faith. He does not believe because of an historical event, but because he believes he can understand an event. The relevance of the Resurrection is its existential quality. Christ rises in the kerygma--the Word.

What then can be made of the definite statements concerning the physical Resurrection of Jesus Christ that are made in the New Testament? Bultmann deals with the Gospel accounts in short order since they are not really relevant to the Easter faith. The Gospel 'portraits' of Jesus are a combination of history and myth. The historical Jesus of Nazareth is used as a backdrop against which the "event(s) of salvation"¹ are seen. Certain points of history--the Crucifixion--are used side by side with the non-historical--the Resurrection--and the legendary--the empty tomb. Therefore, says Bultmann, if the story of the real, human life of Jesus is not only "an attempt to express the meaning of the

1. Bultmann, Rudolf, Kerygma and Myth, Harper & Row, New York, New York, 1953, page 35

historical figure of Jesus and the events of his life," but rather a means of expressing the figure of salvation, then "we can dispense with the objective form in which they are cast."¹ This does not mean that the historical events of Jesus' life are not important--only that one must ask God's meaning for him in these events. But what then does this say about the Resurrection accounts in particular? First of all the event immediately preceeding that is, the Crucifixion, must be dealt with. The Crucifixion was historical in that Jesus was nailed to a cross and there died, but mythological in its objective setting since the interpretation of the event is set in mythological terms such as Son of God, pre-existent, the one who atones for sin, et cetera. Bultmann does not wish to be fettered by the belief in a "mythical process wrought outside of us and our world,"² He would rather understand the historical event of the Cross existentially in order to get at its true, cosmic meaning. The historical event naturally carried a significance for the disciples that it could not possibly carry for anyone else. It meant the death of a personal, flesh and blood friend. The significance which they saw in this event can never be reproduced. Modern man has only the historical record of that Jesus. Therefore, the significance of the Crucifixion cannot lie in the Jesus of history. It is bound up with the Christ of faith, and that Christ of faith is found only in the preaching of the Resurrection faith.

¹Bultmann, Rudolf, Kerygma and Myth, Harper & Row, New York, New York, 1953, page 35

2. Ibid., page 36

If it is this existential quality that is important, what is to be made of the Gospel narratives concerning the Resurrection which certainly stress the physical? In one treatise he dismisses them in one sentence: They are "most certainly later embellishments of the primitive tradition. St. Paul knows nothing about them."¹ The beliefs of the men who wrote about "the physical reality of the risen body"² can perhaps be explained by subjective visions stemming from the past personal intimacy with and devotion to the earthly Jesus. But such explanations are to be left to the historian (whose struggles will probably be fruitless). For Bultmann the importance of the Gospel accounts lies solely in their attempt "to convey the meaning of the cross."³ Objectively speaking they are pure legend, but the meaning that lies behind them is the same as all that which lies behind all discussions of the Resurrection--it communicates the existential nature of the Cross.

In summary, then, Bultmann sees the importance of demythologizing as being its ability to uncover the truths of the New Testament by stripping them of the mythological words and thought patterns that cover them. The Hebrew ideas of justification and sacrifice must be reinterpreted. The first century view of the universe, indeed the whole first century

1. Bultmann, Rudolf, Kerygma and Myth, Harper & Sons, New York, New York, 1953, page 39

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., page 38

mindset must be either re-evaluated or done away with completely. Existentialism is the only method which will give valid insights into the truth of the New Testament.

Two major theories lie behind Bultmann's interpretation of Scripture and particularly the Resurrection, namely his idea of hermeneutics and his idea of history. It is these two stances, which in Bultmann's thinking are practically inseparable, that cause so many problems for modern theology. By hermeneutics is meant "a fundamental inquiry into the conditions which must obtain in the understanding of history or historical documents."¹ Hermeneutics deals with linking events and words of the past with their understanding for modern man. With Schleiermacher hermeneutics grew into "the art of interpreting historical documents to disclose their meaning for us today."² Bultmann, following in the footsteps of Schleiermacher and others conceives of a type psychological hermeneutics. He presupposes a certain link, a common possibility of experience, between the author and the modern interpreter. He realizes that one cannot look at a piece of 'history' objectively, for a person brings his past with him to all of his interpretations in all phases of his life. Everyone has a view of man--a "preunderstanding" of what is and what is not. For Bultmann this preun-

1. Braaten, Carl E., New Directions in Theology Today, Vol. II, History and Hermeneutics, The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1966, page 131

2. Ibid., page 132

derstanding must be the major concern of every man. The Scriptures are to be interpreted existentially because it is man's self-understanding here and now that is important. His self-understanding presupposes that there is an

a priori decision that what is relevant in the text is only that which can be understood beforehand as a possibility of human existence.¹

In other words, all that is important--or non-mythological--in the Bible is that which is specifically concerned with human existence and moreover with the problems of human existence which humans conceive as being important and real. The Resurrection itself is seen from this point of view. Its importance lies in its possibilities for man to gain a new self-understanding. In "the death and Resurrection of Christ as the eschatological event, we are given an opportunity of understanding ourselves."² Bultmann can only claim this self-understanding as the central point of Scripture and of the Resurrection because of the view of history which he holds. One can go no further into his hermeneutical problem without first considering his view of history. For it is on this point that the rest of his work hinges.

Like Wilhelm Hermann in the nineteenth century Bultmann divides history into two categories: Historie and Geschichte. The first refers to the world of means, the second to the world of ends. As men, all live in the first

1. Braaten, Carl, New Directions in Theology Today, V.II, The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1966, page 136

2. Bultmann, Rudolf, Kerygma and Myth, Harper & Sons, 1953, page 41

3. Bultmann, Rudolf, Theology of the New Testament, 1951, page 136

realm. Their life is only "a commerce with things."¹ There is nothing ultimately important here--that is only to be found in Geschichte where men are free, "possessing a faith born of autonomy rather than heteronomy."² This split view of history--much akin to Hermann's Spirit and historical event theory--is responsible for the dualism that Bultmann sees in the New Testament between physical fact and inner truth. Any simple historical facts necessarily lack the means for conversion because they cannot by themselves be internalized--they cannot be totally in man's present experience. This all leads back to Bultmann's theory of preunderstanding which he assumes to be given with human existence. Objective history can only be understood from the frame of reference of this inner 'spiritual' self-understanding. So saying Bultmann's historic dualism can be compared to Hermann's:

Hermann seems to conceive of Spirit and historical event in a semi-interdependence, which enables Christian faith to make use of historical records while enjoying freedom from the fear of historical criticism. Nothing accessible to the principles of historical and textual investigation can afford an adequate basis for faith.³

Historie of course plays a part in developing man's ideas,

1. Niebuhr, Richard R., Resurrection and Historical Reason, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, New York, 1957, page 82
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid. pages 7-8

but it is in Geschichte alone that he is confronted with the possibility of existence, which for Bultmann is the possibility of decision, and it is in the faith of decision that man performs the act of freedom. No objective Historie¹ can have any part in it. Real revelation then is not a part of Historie--is not connected with it--but stems rather from the Vorverstehen, the preunderstanding, the inner Spirit.

It is this Vorverstehen that Bultmann would use to bridge the gap between the author and the translator. He would demythologize--that is, remove the Historie from--the New Testament by using this underlying inner connection to the author's self-understanding. Hence his hermeneutics and his history are inevitably bound up together.

From this viewpoint Bultmann conceives his theories of the Crucifixion and the Resurrection. The Crucifixion, for example, can be regarded as an event in Historie. Jesus Christ did indeed die on the Cross. Bultmann never denies the reality of Jesus of Nazareth: "His life is more than a mythical event; it is a human life which ended in the tragedy of crucifixion."² But it is not the assertion of the crucifixion as an historical³ event that is important. Its significance lies in Geschichte, in the fact that it is the eschatological event and as such acquires cosmic importance. It can therefore be existentially significant, be-

1. Bultmann, Rudolf, Kerygma and Myth, Harper & Row, New York, New York, 1953, page 37

2. Ibid., page 34

3. That is, an event in Historie.

cause by eschatological Bultmann means existentially eschatological. The eschaton can be at any point where man realizes his possibility to choose authentic existence. It does not rely on a future end-time. As Bultmann views it, all references to the Son of Man or Son of God or Incarnate Word dying on the Cross are mythological statements.¹ That is they have no ground in history and are only ways of expressing the author's understanding of the event. The Crucifixion is God's 'action' to bring the understanding of men to themselves. Nothing supernatural has happened.

The Resurrection, then, is pure Geschichte--it is a faith statement which neither depends on Historie nor is explicitly grounded in Historie. It is a faith statement which, in a way, must be an extension of the Vorverstehen manifested in the ideas concerning the Crucifixion. Obviously then, for Bultmann the Resurrection is not, need not and cannot be an event in history which produced faith in the disciples. Rather it was the coming to light of the new self-understanding that brought forth the faith statement embodied in the Resurrection stories? A man's faith today is not dependent on believing in any historical event, not even the Easter event of the disciples' rise in faith, but on a man's own inner self-realization.

The problem with Bultmann's theory lies first in the preunderstanding which he himself brings to the hermeneutical problem. His existentialism severely limits any hope

1. Bultmann, Rudolf, Kerygma and Myth, Harper & Row, New York, New York, 1953, page 2

2. Ibid., page 42

of drawing from the Scriptures any other truths or dimensions that might be found there. All of his interpretations involve a completely existential philosophy which centers in man's own self-understanding. It is this a priori assumption that man's self-understanding is the most important consideration that narrows Bultmann's outlook so drastically. An understanding of the love of God, His actions in history, the Biblical view of history, and salvation are considered to be secondary to a man's own growth of knowledge in and about himself. The question might be raised as to what right Bultmann has to make this a priori assumption. What right does he have to assume that just because an idea can be formulated in history it is automatically nonessential or even mythological, in Bultmann's sense of the term?

Moreover, when he speaks of the Scripture writer's concern with eschatology he interprets this to mean the existential form--that is the placing of the eschaton out of time and history and into the inner now of a man's being. Bultmann assumes that the existential viewpoint is absolutely the only way to interpret Scripture.² It must be interpreted with a background of history and yet out of the realm of history. The value lies not really in seeing the truth that underlies Scripture, but in interpreting it for one's own edification here and now. This then must also be his policy concerning the Resurrection.

1. Bultmann, Rudolf, Kerygma and Myth, Harper & Row, New York, New York, 1953, page 209. (Bultmann Replies to His Critics; an "eschatological Now.") See also Bultmann, Rudolf, Theology of the New Testament, Vol. 1, New York, New York, 1951, page 302.

2. Ibid., page 15.

Existential faith is the basis for all belief rather than any event portrayed in Scriptures as history.

Nothing preceeding the faith which acknowledges the Risen Christ can give insight into the reality of Christ's resurrection. The resurrection cannot--in spite of I Cor. 15:3-8--be demonstrated or made plausible as an objectively ascertainable fact on the basis of which one could believe.¹

Everything, including Saint Paul, must be modified or done away with in order to fit into his preconceived idea of history--his demand as to how things must be. The Resurrection cannot be an historical event because it would change the order of cause and effect, it would break into the pre-ordered structure of the natural world. According to Bultmann this simply cannot be. The order of cause and effect are never broken.² Therefore no story about it can be used as a basis for faith. An historical event first of all can never be such, and secondly since the Resurrection itself is not an historical event it must be an article of faith and one article of faith can never be proved by another.³ The Resurrection is kerygma and kerygma is non-historical.

Bultmann is not willing, because of his preunderstanding and of his view of history, to let the Scriptures stand as Scriptures. Actually he wants much more than a demythologizing--he wants a remythologizing of the Scriptures and the Resurrection in particular as inner existential self-illuminations. Neither of Bultmann's two parts of history

1. Bultmann, Rudolf, Theology of the New Testament, V.I, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, New York, 1951, page 305
2. Ibid., page 6
3. Ibid., page 40

show the necessity for God. Both are seen from what man considers to be real and important and both stem from and try to lead man to man--not to God. All is self-contained within man's little world and man's little outlook. Bultmann's basis for faith and indeed that faith itself is something akin to ideal humanism. Moreover, the Resurrection itself as described by Bultmann eliminates entirely any real necessity for God's action with man or for God's action with God. That is, man interacts with himself in the self-understanding that he acquires. But God is not significantly present in this act. Neither is God's action with God (in Christ) important. The idea of God's raising Christ from the dead is not really important for Bultmann--the important thing seems to be only man's interaction with man. Man has raised up himself through his own new self-understanding. Faith is not longer grounded on faith in an event, or even really on faith in any act of God--the act of God lay in the Crucifixion. Bultmann is strangely silent about what act accounted for the rise of faith. Was it a kind of Pentecost event with God giving a mind to mind revelation of what the Crucifixion really meant? Was it a faith that the disciples worked up in themselves after mysteriously recognizing the reality of their existence? In any event, the "how" in the disciples' rise of faith is not essential to Bultmann because modern man's faith is not faith in the disciples' Easter event any more than it is a faith in a historical resurrection. What Christianity actually becomes is a faith in faith. Since Bultmann insists that the real Easter event did not concern an historical action of God on Christ (dispite what Scripture may say) but rather in a sudden rise in faith, what more can faith be than

faith in his own faith? Being existential it neither has a past or a future. The eschatological event is always present, but what does this event turn out to be? It is man's realization of the possibility of making a decision. He decides for decision and therein rests his faith. God's actions in history with men, the fact of salvation and love are not really the epitome of the realization for Bultmann.

Many theologians believe that Bultmann has begun from the wrong end. He has presupposed a view of history and then fit everything else into it including hermeneutics. One of the newest and most vocal of these men is Wolfhart Pannenberg who strongly asserts that kerygma with no history behind it is completely meaningless. "The preaching of the 'Word of God' is an empty assertion if it is severed from what really happened in history."¹ He argues that what is the kerygma if not the declaration of what God has done in history. Bultmann's concept of the kerygma has no real time element. It is all inner directed and inner-generated. Pannenberg sees revelation as history--it is not above history or other than history. He, like Bultmann, excludes the supernatural, but for a different reason. He does not see God as being wholly Other as Bultmann does. But the main point that should be made here is that Pannenberg, like many other theologians, would start with the historical fact of the Resurrection and from there build a view of history instead of

1. Braaten, Carl, New Directions in Theology Today, V.II, Westminster Press, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1966, page 26.

beginning with a view of history and trying to make life fit into it. In other words, Pannenberg sees history as its own interpreter--not as a set of pre-existent rules which can never be broken. The mere fact that an event is unique cannot be claimed as sufficient evidence that it is non-historical or non-real. The Resurrection,, when seen as an historical fact, does not break the laws of nature, but rather those of death. In one sense it can be viewed something in the style of Plotinus--death is merely the absence of this life, and wherever life is--like darkness fleeing before light--death is no longer. Christ said He was "the life"; is it not then death that He has engulfed and not nature's laws? Even if one could not accept this reasoning it would not necessitate flight to Bultmann's side. Bultmann has, in one sense rejected the kerygma by redefining it and setting it outside of the realm in which it was made manifest. He quite rightly views Jesus Christ as the Logos--the Word--and as such as the important realization for man, but at the same time he severely limits the meaning of the Incarnation. The Incarnation becomes little more than a vehicle--it is virtually stripped of any idea of the sacrificing love of God. Jesus of Nazareth is treated in an I-It relationship with man. He is used by man for man's own self-understanding, for his own self-communion, rather than as a communion in love with God through the person of Jesus.

Bultmann has reconstructed history, as all men must do, but

he has not seen fit, apparently, to explain what the theory is behind his historical interpretation. Why, it may be asked, does he split history? How does he justify this stance? He seems to have limited the scope of the Gospels considerably with his idea of the ultimate importance of the self-understanding of man and the idea that whatever man cannot fit into his twentieth century mindset is untenable.¹ By this method he has re-mythologized, to some extent, the Resurrection into internal self-realizations. He has had a tendency to reject Scripture when it did not fit his thoughts, (as when he says "in spite of I Cor. 15: 3-8")² He has turned faith back on itself for a foundation and reversed the order of the Resurrection saying that the disciples' faith caused the Resurrection rather than that the Resurrection caused the disciples' faith.³ He has depended to a great extent on a theory of preunderstanding which he on the one hand proclaims to be a natural, inborn phenomenon and on the other hand he loads with theological presuppositions. He has caused faith in the kerygma to be man's only anchor, but he has apparently failed to state finally what that kerygma is based on. He seems to have cut away its roots. Through his use of twentieth century logic he has allowed an existentialist mindset or at least an existentialist preunderstanding to be superimposed on first century man. Because he has seen fit to make existentialism the only possible way to self-understanding he has virtually severed any lines of communication between God and man and God and Christ. It would seem that he has leaned so heavily on an existential interpretation of the Logos that God takes a very hazy part in his theology.

1. See page 21 of this paper.

2. Bultmann, Rudolf, Theology of the New Testament, V. I, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, New York, 1951, page 305

3. Bultmann, Rudolf, Kerygma and Myth, Harper & Row, New York, New York, 1953, page 42

Bultmann's importance must not, of course, be overlooked. His swing toward a personal understanding and expression of the faith is indeed necessary. Too often today the emphasis in the Church has been on group action and group goals. The idea of an internalization of the event of Christ has been drastically underplayed. There is definitely a sense in which the non-historical aspect of Christ--which could be designated by the term Holy Spirit--needs to be emphasized and brought into man's everyday life. The issue at present is the necessary turn that Bultmann's theology must take if his theories of hermeneutics and history limit his understanding of Christ to this narrow emphasis. Even if his position concerning hermeneutics and history is untenable in the long run, he nevertheless has opened up the field for Protestant theology. Every theologian of any stature in the last thirty years has had to deal with Bultmann on these two points and then delineate his own position. Bultmann has tried to face squarely the problems he sees in the traditional interpretation of Scripture. He has not yet lost his power in the field of modern theology. Bultmann remains the man to contend with in the field of hermeneutics and history. No longer can one assume a hermeneutical or historical understanding of Scripture and proceed from there. Now modern theology must first deal with Bultmann and then with itself.

In summary the conclusions that may be drawn from this

study are both numerous and significant. First of all, looking back on the examples of Weatherhead and Morison, it becomes evident that there is a great danger in placing too much emphasis on the details of the actual physical act of Christ's Resurrection. For one thing it must ultimately end in pure conjecture since man can only work from his own meager understanding^g the way in which events must take place and knows nothing of reality unless it is revealed (one may take that term as one wishes) by God. This preoccupation with the physical methods can only sidetrack man into the delusion that the total impact of the Resurrection lies in its proving immortality. This view is misleading for two reasons. First, immortality of the soul is not claimed in Scripture but rather the promise of eternal life by virtue of Christ's saving love. The two are not at all the same. Automatic immortality has throughout history been claimed by many religions. It presupposes an innate quality in man which enables him, in one state or another, to live forever. Eternal life is a different thing altogether. It is not a natural quality possessed by 'natural man', but rather a gift of Grace given by God. It implies a quality of existence rather than emphasizing a quantity of existence. This overconcentration on) immortality also tends to make one overlook the implications for the present time which are made by the fact of living in a world that is under the judgment and grace of Resurrection.

What does the Resurrection mean for life in the now? For one thing it means hope in the present life:

Is it Christ Jesus who died, yes, who was raised from the dead, who is ~~at the right~~ hand of God, who intercedes for us? Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?...No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. (Romans 8:34-35 and 37)

It means freedom in this life from law and from sin: "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death." (Romans 8:2). It means freedom to become servants--to become true men:

And he died for all, that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who for their sake died and was raised. From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view.... (2 Corinthians 5: 15-16)

It also means that in this life all men live under the judgment of the Resurrected Christ:

Let the time that is past suffice for doing what the Gentiles like to do, living in licentiousness, passions, drunkenness, revels, carousing, and lawless idolatry...but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. (I Peter 4:3-4 and 6)

This is the tone both implicit and explicit in the New Testament, that life in the Resurrected Christ demands a new style of life--it puts all things both in this life and the next on a different basis. It is this that the authors who are concerned with securing immortality miss so much in their discussions.

cussions.

This tone is also the basis which Pannenburg uses for beginning with the Resurrection and proceeding to history. For the Christian, life, history, everything, begins at the Resurrection which has qualitatively changed the entire man and hence calls for a qualitative change in the way he thinks and lives. It demands a new point of view and a new focal point.

Bultmann, much more than the others, has emphasized the need for viewing oneself in the now--for recognizing the real self. "in accepting the word of preaching as the word of God and the death and resurrection of Christ as the eschatological event, we are given an opportunity of understanding ourselves."¹ However, in his passion for this side of the issue it would seem that God becomes little more than an objective catalyst for man's self-understanding. Mystery, such as a physical resurrection, must be brought down to man's level or done away with. All things, in order to be acceptable, must work for man's own self-understanding, and for his own ends. He has completely de-emphasized the inter-triune, (that is the actions of God on Christ, especially in the Resurrection) communion of God's raising Christ from the dead. The emphasis on the new man in Christ is not present--only on man as he has really always been. He becomes the self-enlightened man who has been transformed not so much by love and grace as by faith in his own faith. Bultmann's eschatology, by being always in the present², has eliminated any future for man. Man is totally existential. He brings to his study of New Testament Scripture a pre-conceived pattern as to how things must be (and who does not?), but he will not revise it,

1.. Bultmann, Rudolf, Kerygma and Myth, Harper & Row, New York, New York, 1953, page 41

2. Ibid., page 209

taking out of history and placing in the psyche anything that does not fit his idea of Historie. He ends up remythologizing much of what does not fit his Historie into psychological categories and descriptions. And in the long run how is it any better for him to make everything conform to his twentieth century psychology than it was for the Scripture writers to make it conform to their first century view of reality? Is it an honest evaluation to reflect existentialism onto Scripture as the only possible emphasis? How much is lost? How much distorted? Various theologians¹ have various answers to these questions. ~~It has been the purpose of this paper only to raise some of the questions.~~

But it has not been the purpose of this essay to give specific answers. Rather it has been to ~~redescribe~~ some familiar and some not so familiar viewpoints, to point out what may be fallacies where they are most obvious and to try to ~~gain insights into~~ the importance of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Certainly none of the men presented, and most certainly not Professor Bultmann, have had their views exhausted here. Bultmann has gone into detail on the Pauline and Johnine writings which studies were ~~just barely~~ mentioned per se in this paper. It is only his basic thesis on the Resurrection that has been dealt with here. The author's opinions of those particular views have been delineated. It is only hoped that questions have been raised and minds stimulated by this discussion.

1. Some of those mentioned were Gullmann, Tenney, Braaten, Pannenburg, and Niebuhr.

The author herself must still hold the orthodox position following the Pauline outline. Faith in a Resurrection body--of whatever kind no one can be sure--and in the implications for this life and a future life are basic to holding this position. Like Pannenburg, the author would hold to the idea of revelation within history, although she would not be willing to hold Pannenburg's viewpoint that all history is revelation. To a degree this may be true, but there is still a more perfect type of revelation that presents itself in history and yet, like Bultmann's theory, also presents itself to the core of a man. However, it is not only an inner self-realization that takes place--although that is most certainly a part of it--but also a new dimension in historical existence; that is existence with God, as a person with his ultimate source. It is a personal communion with an objectively real God who makes Himself known to man through love. The Resurrection is the epitome of this kind of revelation. It comes to man where he is, in history, because it comes through an historical event. By the Holy Spirit it is kept an ever present reality for man while at the same time stemming from an historical event. A man's birth is an historical event, but a man does not stay in that past time although he is always somehow connected with it. So it is with the Resurrection of Jesus Christ--since it was a Resurrection for all men, all men move forward from it, but

yet they are always grounded in it. No work is done that is not a reaction either positively or negatively from the Resurrection. In the love which this act of God displayed, man must always move. It is man's challenge to move with the current of that love and thus affirm his changedness through Christ.

Bultmann's double view of history results in the lack of a solid base on which to establish a forward moving course of action. Conversion becomes such an internalized thing that the danger of rationalizing experience and Scripture, to a certain extent, to fit one's ideas of what is true--as seen through the conversion experience--becomes very great. Although Bultmann denies that his idea of faith is subjectivism, it must of necessity become such since he gives one nothing objective on which to base it. To be sure there are real historical events that enter into the picture, but what exactly can one look to for an understanding of faith? He says the objective basis of faith is the preaching of the Word. But he is hard put to explain just how it is that this preaching comes about. He says he cannot "raise...the problem of how this preaching arose historically...." "It is not for us to question its credentials."¹ But how can man help but question its credentials? Apparently it is the one thing that validates man's life. How and why and from whom did this preaching originate?

1. Bultmann, Rudolf, Kerygma and Myth, Harper & Row, New York, New York, 1953, page 41

As far as the author can determine the Resurrection is God's way of proclaiming the finality of His Word. It showed in a graphic way, in history, in a way which man could understand, what it meant to be a man in this world, and what kind of a world it was. The disciples did not view the Resurrection as a "web of arguments"¹ but as an event, and one which they could understand. God became man in Jesus Christ because He wanted to speak to man within man's view of reality--He spoke to men in history; He became history. The graciousness of the Resurrection can be seen in the fact that in His infinite love God carried it out where man lived--in history and through history. Both Jesus and the Scripture writers saw the Resurrection of Christ as the fulfillment of the prophecies. God had worked in history through the prophets, now, in these later days he had spoken in history through His Son. Saint Stephen in his defense traced the history of God's acts up to the act of Christ's life. God had shown His people His nature in history before--Christ was the most perfect revelation. Was it not then for Him to raise Him up, to vindicate him in history also?

1. Tenney, Merrill C., The Reality of the Resurrection, Harper & Row, Evanston, Illinois, 1963, page 17

Final Note

Of course the argument over the meaning and historicity of the Resurrection will probably never be resolved to everyone's satisfaction, and perhaps it never needs to be. The faith of a child does not involve long theological debates into the interior of the mind of God; and after all it is only the faith of a child, simple, believing, that our Lord asks of us. To spend too much time dealing with the little points, the intricacies of meaning would be to do Christ a disservice. Christ has told men that what He desires from men is a simple belief that He is their salvation, their path to God, and their ultimate goal. If a man believes that he is living under the Resurrected Christ and if he believes it because God has shown man that kind of sacrificing, triumphing love in the actual act of the Resurrection, then that man will become the kind of man that God intended him to be. He will realize that he is living in a new kind of history and as a living part of that history he will respond as a Son of God.

In so far as theology seeks to make it clear to man what God would have him know for his life, and in so far as it seeks to bring him into communion with God, then theology has been vindicated. But whenever theology becomes an escape for the theologian--used as an excuse not to act

act--or a source of confusion for God's children so that they are no longer sure what to believe at all, or whenever the theologian will twist and distort the message of God so as to uplift his own viewpoint, then it should be anathema to all people. If this small paper (a poor excuse for theology, to be sure) has within it any of the aforementioned elements then let it never be believed by anyone. But if there is any truth in it, then let it be taken to heart. The Resurrection is a difficult topic on which to speak, and yet it is the foundation of all history and as such, attempts must be made to make it more clear.

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